



Lane Transit District
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INFORMATIONAL PACKET JULY 2005

(These materials are being distributed for the Board's information, since the July 20, 2005, regular LTD Board meeting was canceled.)

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INFORMATIONAL PACKET SUMMARY

DATE OF PACKET: July 2005

ITEM TITLE: PRELIMINARY JUNE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

PREPARED BY: Diane Hellekson, Director of Finance & Information Technology

ACTION REQUESTED: None

BACKGROUND: As in the past, the preliminary June financial report will be mailed to Board members at the end of July. The final June report, which will include audited numbers and the independent auditor opinion, will be part of the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report issued this fall. The majority of the audit field work is scheduled for September.

ATTACHMENTS: None

PROPOSED MOTION: None

INFORMATIONAL PACKET SUMMARY

DATE OF MEETING: July 2005

ITEM TITLE: BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

PREPARED BY: Jo Sullivan, Administrative Services Manager/Clerk of the Board

ACTION REQUESTED: None

BACKGROUND: Board members have been appointed to the Metropolitan Policy Committee (MPC), and on occasion are appointed to other local or regional committees. Board members also will present testimony at public hearings on specific issues as the need arises. After meetings, public hearings, or other activities attended by individual Board members on behalf of LTD, time will be scheduled on the next Board meeting agenda for an oral report by the Board member. The following activities have occurred since the last Board meeting:

MEETINGS HELD

Board members can take this opportunity to report briefly on any one-on-one meetings they have held with local officials.

1. **Eugene Chamber Local Government Affairs Committee:** In late June Gerry Gaydos attended a meeting of the Eugene Chamber's Local Government Affairs Committee (LGAC) to update the group on the Board's decision to delay implementation of the tax increase until 2007.
2. **Metropolitan Policy Committee:** MPC meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month. Board members Gerry Gaydos and Susan Ban are LTD's MPC representatives, with Dave Kleger as an alternate. Ms. Ban and Mr. Gaydos attended the MPC meeting on July 14, 2005. This meeting was a joint meeting with the Citizen's Advisory Committee. The agenda for the meeting included approval of the Surface Transportation Program – Urban (STP-U) allocations for FY 07; discussion of the selection criteria for STP-U projects for FY 07-09; Discussion of the Regional Transportation Plan update; and some amendments to the Metropolitan Transportation Improvements Program.

NO MEETINGS/NO REPORT

1. **LTD Salaried Employees Retirement Plan and ATU Pension Plan Trusts:** Both Trusts meet quarterly. They last met on May 19, 2005. The next meeting has not yet been scheduled. Both plans have chosen to have a formal performance review of their investment firms and are changing their insurance brokers.
2. **BRT Steering Committee:** Board President Gerry Gaydos and Board members Dean Kortge and Debbie Davis are members of LTD's BRT Steering Committee, along with members of local units of government and community representatives. The Committee meets quarterly. The Steering Committee last met on June 7, 2005. At that meeting, the Committee approved a recommendation on the corridor to be selected for Progressive Corridor Enhancement and heard updates on the Franklin Corridor, the Pioneer Parkway corridor, and the vehicle purchase. The next meeting is scheduled for September 6, 2005.
3. **Region 2050 Policy Advisory Board:** Susan Ban is the Board's representative on the Region 2050 Policy Advisory Board (Policy Board), with Mike Eyster as an alternate. The Policy Board last met on June 22, 2005, with Mr. Eyster attending. The agenda for that meeting included a preliminary discussion of the Transportation analysis for the three growth scenarios.

PROPOSED MOTION: None

INFORMATIONAL PACKET SUMMARY

DATE OF MEETING: July 2005

ITEM TITLE: CORRESPONDENCE

PREPARED BY: Ken Hamm, General Manager

ACTION REQUESTED: None

ATTACHMENTS: The attached correspondence is included for the Board's information:

- June 27, 2005, memorandum from the "Roundtable Group" to Eugene City Council, Lane County Board of Commissioners, and LTD, regarding transportation issues in West Eugene
- July 25, 2005, response to Roundtable Group from Board President Gerry Gaydos
- July 20, 2005, e-mail message from Dave Hauser of the Eugene Chamber of Commerce to Chamber members regarding the West Eugene Enterprise Zone

PROPOSED MOTION: None

INFORMATIONAL PACKET SUMMARY

DATE OF MEETING: July 2005

ITEM TITLE: BOARD CALENDARS

PREPARED BY: Jo Sullivan, Administrative Services Manager/Clerk of the Board

ACTION REQUESTED: None

BACKGROUND: The enclosed updated Board Activity Calendars are included for the Board members' information. Please contact Jo Sullivan with any changes in your availability for LTD-related meetings and events, or to provide your summer and fall vacation dates.

ATTACHMENT: Board calendars are included as a separate document for Board members only.

PROPOSED MOTION: None



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MONTHLY DEPARTMENT REPORTS

July 2005

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GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Linda Lynch, Government Relations Manager

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STATE LEGISLATURE

End games at the state capitol are in full swing. While lobbyists fire up barbecues hoping they are hosting farewell parties, legislators are engaged in complicated tugs-of-war. The measure of most interest to Lane Transit District, the governor's ConnectOregon lottery-funded transportation initiative, is key to end-of-session strategies. At this writing, transit is being removed from the measure, primarily because it is one element that the House is willing to jettison in its efforts to confront both the Senate and the Governor.

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Senate Bill 71, which would allow the state to borrow \$100 million from lottery bonds to strengthen rail, port, and other non-highway transportation, passed unanimously last month out of the Senate but has stalled in the House. Some lawmakers want to wipe out money for public transit -- a move strenuously opposed by Senate Majority Leader Kate Brown, D-Portland. And House Speaker Karen Minnis, R-Wood Village, wants to amend the bill to ban the Port of Portland from developing large-scale rail operations at a former aluminum site in Troutdale, which is in her district.

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The original plan has backing from a wide assortment of business and industry groups, including the Oregon Business Council, Oregon Steel Mills, and the Oregon Food Processors Council, which creates extra impetus for the bill's passage. A key issue is whether the transportation plan's primary purpose is to move freight or to address infrastructure needs, including public transit. The House has proposed an amendment to eliminate funding for bus and light rail. But the Senate would probably not concur in changes that take out money for transit.

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Sen. Bruce Starr, R-Hillsboro, said he thinks the chambers eventually will compromise on public transit, as well as the aluminum site issue.

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- Staff have completed work with the Hastus software people to include meal breaks into the run-cutting software. A final run-cut solution is now being proofread.
- Oregon County Fair service was implemented successfully. There were a total of 24,102 boardings, which is down about 2,500 from last year. Staff have heard that Fair attendance also was down, but this will be confirmed by the Oregon Country Fair at a later date
- Service Planning staff have begun preparing schedules for the Lane County Fair and football season. No significant change in service is anticipated.
- Due to lane changes near the intersection, the bus stop at 11th and Alder needed to be temporarily relocated to the west until EmX service begins. The EmX stations at Dad's Gate and 11th and Hilyard will serve as the new stops along the East 11th corridor between Franklin and Mill.
- The bus stops at Beltline and Game Farm Road will be closed while the intersection is being reconstructed.

COMMUTER SOLUTIONS

Connie B. Williams, Program Manager

Group Pass/Employee Transportation Coordinator (ETC) Programs: The following organizations signed up for a Group Pass program, representing an additional 277 eligible bus pass participants:

- Capella Market
- Clueless at the Top
- Lane County Catholic Worker
- M.A.S. Enterprises
- Oregon Supported Living
- Oregon Temporary Services

As a result of the Congestion Mitigation Program (CMP) Project, 12 organizations signed up for the Group Pass Program.

Emergency Ride Home (ERH) Program: Clueless at the Top (10 employees) signed up to provide their employees the ERH Program. As a result of the CMP Project, six organizations signed up for the program.

Congestion Mitigation Program/I-105 Construction Project: The I-105 project was completed June 26. Proactive communications, an accelerated construction schedule, and community patience contributed to a successful project. The www.keepusmoving.info Web site played a major role. Traffic counts are being done by Commuter Solutions, ODOT, and the County. Upon initial review of the traffic count reports, the information appears to have

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worked well with traffic volumes not as severe as the congestion modeling predicted. Lane Council of Governments, Lane Transit District/Commuter Solutions, and the Oregon Department of Transportation will continue to develop the www.keepusmoving.info Web site as a gateway to regional transportation project information. The www.keepusmoving.info Web site had more than one million hits from the start of the site through June 23.

As a result of the initial mailings to all businesses regarding the project, there were 59 inquiries for Commuter Solutions program packets. Out of those 59 who received information on Commuter Solutions programs offered, 13 businesses (or 22 percent of the 59 inquiries) signed up to provide their employees (345 total employees) the Group Pass and/or Emergency Ride Home Program(s).

Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) and Commuter Solutions are working together on an evaluation summary report of the CMP Project. The report should be completed by July 2005.

Smart Ways to School Program

- The Task Force on School-Related Transportation met on June 2.
- KVAL provided news coverage on Edison Elementary School's Smart Ways to School contest.
- Seven school contests concluded with 600 students and more than 100 adults participating to walk, bike, bus, and carpool to school.
- Post-surveys were distributed to parents of students at all participating schools; data will be summarized in July.
- Post-surveys for the pilot high school bus pass program were conducted with high school students at participating schools; data will be summarized next month.

Regional Transportation Planning/Strategies:

- STP-U Application: The application for possible use of the additional \$130,000 STP-U funds was recommended for approval by the Metropolitan Planning Committee (MPC). MPC is to take action on this and other recommended projects for the STP-U funding on July 14, 2005.
- TravelSmart: ODOT has hired Socialdata as the contractor on the project. The contract will conduct three pilot projects in Bend, Eugene/Springfield, and Salem. The project is a targeted dialogue marketing program to provide information and encouragement to individuals to reduce the number of trips taken: to walk, bicycle, carpool, vanpool, and use public transit as alternatives to driving alone; and to document the effects of the effort on personal travel behavior.

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TRANSIT OPERATIONS

Mark Johnson, Director of Transit Operations

There is no Transit Operations report this month.

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¶ Operations staff participated in a two day workshop to develop a job specific tool to assist in hiring new supervisors. Three supervisors and two managers from LTD participated with several other supervisors and managers from agencies throughout the northwest to help develop this tool. We are ...

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MAINTENANCE

Sam Marra, Director of Maintenance

There is no Maintenance report.

FINANCE AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Diane Hellekson, Director of Finance and Information Technology

FINANCE

Carol James, Accounting Manager

Three hundred fifty-two (352) vendor checks, totaling \$3,154,253.50, were processed during the month of June, including \$207,129 to John Hyland Construction Co., for work related to the Springfield Station; \$476,884 to Wildish Building Company for work related to the EmX Franklin Corridor; \$454,224 to Schetky N.W. Sales for paratransit vehicles; and \$431,391 to SAIF for prepayment of FY 2005-2006 workers' compensation insurance.

Eighty-three (83) payroll checks and 903 payroll direct deposits totaling \$738,162.76 were made in June 2005. These numbers reflect two pay dates in June.

Twelve cash fare deposits totaling \$120,691.98 were made in June 2005.

The budget development process for FY 2005-2006 was completed in June 2005, with Board adoption of the Budget Committee-approved budget on June 15, 2005. At that same

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EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR

Employees of the Year were selected for 2003 and 2004. A barbecue was held to celebrate their achievements on June 16. Employees of the Month for the two years also were honored. About 150 employees joined in the celebration.

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TRAINING ASSESSMENT

An assessment of the current training needs was conducted by an outside consultant during June. A report with findings and recommendations has been submitted and will be reviewed by the Leadership Council.

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Deleted: A new class of four bus operators began in early May. We now have all bus operator vacancies filled.

Deleted: Internal applications were taken for bus operators who were interested in also becoming instructors. Four new employees were selected for this role. Instructors teach a variety of topics in the classroom during Fall Operator Training and throughout the year. They also provide on-the-job instruction to new bus operators in the field.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Members of the Human Resources Department participated in the 20th Anniversary of Assessable Services event at Amazon Center. It was especially helpful to view how various mobility devices will maneuver in the new EmX bus design. This will help to determine what potential liability issues, if any, may exist with the design of the new vehicle.

Anita Yap began as the new Strategic Planner on May 16. Sue Quick assumed her new duties as Operations Services Manager as well. Sue has selected Rick Thompson as the new Operations Supervisor to replace her. Rick has been a Temporary Supervisor for the past several months.

Directors of Maintenance, Operations, and Human Resources have been meeting to work on plans to build connections among the three departments. A number of ideas were discussed and will be shared with others as they are solidified.

LTD is taking advantage of a program funded by the US Department of Labor (DOL) to help employees over 55 re-enter the work place. LTD selected Robert Williams to fill a part time role in front reception. He began on May 25. The DOL provides the wages, insurance coverage, and all other employment-related expenses.

The director of Human Resources attended an International Foundation of Education, Benefits, and Compensation certification training for "Achievement in Public Plan Policy," as well as the annual pension benefits conference for public employers. Both will be held in Portland in early July.

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INFORMATIONAL PACKET SUMMARY

DATE OF MEETING: July 2005

ITEM TITLE: DIVERSITY MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

PREPARED BY: Mary Neidig, Director of Human Resources and Risk Management

ACTION REQUESTED: None

BACKGROUND: At the June 15, 2005, Board of Director's meeting, David Collier and Mary Neidig presented information regarding an interagency Memorandum of Understanding titled "Diversity and Human Rights Consortium: Reaffirming the Commitment" and discussed the work LTD is doing regarding diversity. At that time we did not have a signed copy of the interagency Memorandum of Understanding. The signed copy is attached.

PROPOSED MOTION: None

INFORMATIONAL PACKET SUMMARY

DATE OF PACKET: July 2005

ITEM TITLE: ITEMS FOR ACTION/INFORMATION AT A FUTURE MEETING

PREPARED BY: Jo Sullivan, Administrative Services Manager/Clerk of the Board

ACTION REQUESTED: None at this time

BACKGROUND: The action or information items listed below will be included on the agenda for future Board meetings:

- A. **Board Committee Assignments:** Board Committee assignments will be finalized at the next meeting of the Board of Directors.
- B. **Special Transportation Advisory Committee (STAC):** A revision of the STAC bylaws will be on the Consent Calendar for the September 21, 2005, regular Board meeting. Membership appointments also will be on the agenda at that meeting.
- C. **Lane County Medical Transportation Brokerage:** Approval of a county transportation brokerage will be on the agenda for Board approval at the September 21, 2005, regular Board meeting.
- D. **Comprehensive Annual Financial Report:** An auditor's presentation on the FY 2004-05 independent financial audit and acceptance of the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report will be on the agenda for the October 19, 2005, regular Board meeting.
- E. **Commuter Solutions Annual Report:** This annual informational presentation will be on the agenda in November 2005.
- F. **LTD Retirement/Pension Plan Review:** A work session to review the LTD retirement and pension plans will be on the agenda for a future meeting.
- G. **EmX Updates:** Various action and information items will be placed on Board meeting agendas during the design and implementation phases of the EmX bus rapid transit project.



LTD General Manager's Report to the Board of Directors

July 2005

Prepared by Ken Hamm, General Manager

FUTURE DATES TO REMEMBER

July 31, 2005	LTD Employee/Board Night at the Ems Baseball Game
July 30-Aug 2, 2005	APTA Board Members Seminar
August 8, 2005	LTD Board Work Session (tentative)
August 17, 2005	LTD Regular Board Meeting
August 28, 2005	LTD Picnic (tentative)
September 5, 2005	Labor Day Holiday (Sunday Service; LTD administrative offices closed)
September 12, 2005	LTD Board Work Session (tentative)
September 15, 2005	LTD Regular Board Meeting
Sept. 25-28, 2005	APTA Annual Meeting and Expo

EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES

ODOT Interview Team

On June 17th I participated on an interview panel for this area's district manager for the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). LTD's participation represents the partnering that has developed between ODOT and [LTD since we began working together on the Franklin EmX project](#). This is a positive indicator of ODOT's recognition of transit's role in the region's transportation system [and will pay dividends as LTD works with ODOT on the Pioneer Parkway EmX project](#).

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MLK Parkway

LTD Board Member Mike Eyster spoke at the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway on June 23, along with Springfield Mayor Sid Leiken, Lane County Commissioner Anna Morrison, and Henry Luvert, president of the local chapter of the NAACP. This new road signifies a piece of the transportation infrastructure necessary to support the development occurring in this area. EmX was a significant part of some of the speakers' messages and was recognized as part of the transportation solution. [Although LTD had to force the issue of inclusion of an exclusive busway on the extension, it appears that all the parties now accept the value of this addition. This will help in making future transit improvements part of general transportation improvements.](#)

Michael Winter Visit

Michael Winter is the director of the Office of Civil Rights at the Federal Transit Administration. Michael visited [LTD for the first time](#) on June 24th to work with LTD

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management and the Special Transportation Advisory Committee on accessibility solutions for EmX vehicles. A mockup of the interior of an EmX vehicle was built by staff, and committee members helped evaluate different options for wheelchair bay applications. LTD is a nationally recognized leader in accessible transit. Michael wanted to be here in person to understand our needs and work on creative solutions that meet the intent of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). It is very significant to have him here personally. [His presence signals that LTD is a key player in defining the ADA issues and potential solutions related to BRT nationally.](#)

City of Springfield

I met on June 28th with Springfield Assistant City Manager Cynthia Pappas. The City appreciates the partnering that is going on at all levels of staff. LTD made a \$25,000 commitment to the Gateway planning effort and \$25,000 to the Glenwood/Franklin Boulevard planning effort. This effort is appreciated by the City and backs LTD's need to be a party to the solutions in both areas. In Glenwood, the Franklin corridor [planning](#) will include right-of-way for completion of the EmX dedicated lanes. [While joint planning requires constant attention to balance competing needs, it is clear that LTD and Springfield have established a much more cooperative and productive working relationship than has existed in the past.](#)

Springfield Conference Center

The Springfield Chamber is leading an effort to locate a new conference center in their city. I was asked by Dan Egan, Chamber executive vice president, to participate on the committee. The first meeting was held at the PeaceHealth Annex June 28. The City and Chamber have done some preliminary work and are considering several sites in the north Gateway area. A major consideration in site analysis is the transportation infrastructure. EmX plans were a part of the discussion in this preliminary meeting. LTD is recognized as an essential tool in moving people through this area [and to a proposed center in the future.](#)

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Heads Up!

This is a reminder that LTD has given the Springfield Utility Board a 20-foot easement on the north side of our Glenwood property as an extension of 14th Street. You will remember that LTD had proposed a bike path along that strip at one time as part of the EmX alternatives. The City of Springfield is considering this same strip for a temporary bike trail if the funding [for construction](#) can be found. LTD has continued to support the bike path.

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NABI Vehicle Visit

North American Bus Industries brought their articulated BRT vehicle by for a viewing at LTD on June 27th. They [are](#) currently building [this model](#) of bus for Los Angeles. It mirrors to some degree the vehicle New Flyer Industries is building for LTD's EmX service. If anyone had a doubt about the impact of the visual exterior of the bus, those who went for a ride can attest that it is huge. On the short test ride, there were people waving, giving thumbs up, and even rolling down their [car](#) windows and asking questions. Image is critical. [Staff are now collecting information for an up-to-date report on LTD's EmX](#)

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[program. It will be sent to the Board the last week of July. We intend to cover all aspects of the program: final design, property acquisition, permits, construction, vehicle acquisition, and operational plans. If you have a specific question on the project, please contact me or Mark Pangborn and we will include a response in the report.](#)

INTERNAL ACTIVITIES

Pension Training

Mary Neidig, Carol Allred, Mark Pangborn, and I attended an International Foundation benefits training conference in Portland July 11-13. LTD's trusts are small in comparison with most other pension plans. LTD's plans have been well handled and remain strong. As trustees, all of us recognize that we can continue to look at opportunities to enhance the plans. We have some ideas and will be sharing them with the board when our ideas are formalized.

Eugene Ems Game

July 31st is the employee outing to the Eugene Emeralds baseball game. I encourage Board members and their families to come out and enjoy good fellowship with some of our employees and friends. Board interaction with the employees is a win-win for everyone.

Joint Insurance Committee (JIC) Meeting

The JIC met on June 22. LTD's agent of record presented information about self-insuring. This approach may have administrative and financial benefits to the District. The committee continues to discuss programs that can enhance our insurance programs.

ATU/GM Meeting

Carol Allred, LTD's ATU executive board officer, and I met on June 29. Together, we are sharing ideas intended to create a new culture of cooperation and collaboration at LTD. Trust is built over time. Carol and I have pledged to work to build a more positive work place.

New Employee Orientation

[Although LTD did not add any additional service this year, normal attrition due to retirements and illness necessitates that LTD recruit and hire new staff. Even with a recovering economy and the publicity due to the strike, LTD continues to attract a quality pool of applicants. In the past six months, LTD has hired 16 drivers, 2 maintenance staff, and 1 administrative position. All of these employees receive an orientation on LTD's mission, goals, guiding principles, and values. In these sessions, where all department directors and I present programs, open dialogue and questions are encouraged. These orientation sessions may be a future opportunity for Board connectivity with new employees.](#)

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INFORMATIONAL PACKET SUMMARY

DATE OF MEETING: July 2005

ITEM TITLE: MONTHLY PERFORMANCE AND LABOR TRENDS REPORTS

PREPARED BY: Ken Hamm, General Manager

ACTION REQUESTED: None

BACKGROUND: In response to a request by the Board for regular reporting on the District's performance in several areas, monthly performance reports are provided for the Board's information. The June 2005 Performance Report will be distributed to the Board in late July with the financial statements.

The monthly *Eugene/ Springfield Metro Labor Trends* publication from the Oregon Employment Department is included for the Board's information.

ATTACHMENTS: July 2005 *Eugene/Springfield Metro Labor Trends*

PROPOSED MOTION: None

Memorandum

Date: July 25, 2006
To: Board of Directors
From: Mark Johnson, Director of Transit Operations
RE: Smoking at the Eugene Station

Last September there were some complaints from customers waiting in Bay H at the Eugene Station that smokers in the plaza were getting too close and secondhand smoke was drifting into the bay. There were concerns because of the impacts of the secondhand smoke on those who do not smoke. The Board reviewed the issue and some possible solutions.

As a reminder, the Eugene Station is a non-smoking facility except for the plaza area, where smoking is allowed. Bay H is adjacent to the plaza. I recommended last September that District personnel monitor the situation and encourage the smokers to move farther away to minimize the smoke drifting into the boarding areas. I also recommended that we visit the issue again this summer to see how it was working.

I am happy to report that the monitoring and educating has been working and there have been no other complaints regarding secondhand smoke in that area. We will continue to keep an eye on the situation to ensure that we can maintain the current state of harmony.

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Lane Transit District

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Eugene, Oregon 97401-0470*

*3500 East 17th Avenue
Eugene, Oregon 97403*

*Phone: 541-682-6100
Fax: 682-6111
TTY: 800-735-2900
E-mail: ltd@ltd.lane.or.us
Internet: www.ltd.org*

INFORMATIONAL PACKET SUMMARY

DATE OF MEETING: July 2005

ITEM TITLE: NEWS ARTICLES ABOUT TRANSIT ISSUES AROUND THE COUNTRY

PREPARED BY: Mark Pangborn, Assistant General Manager

ACTION REQUESTED: None, information only

BACKGROUND: As begun in August 2004, each month's Board packet will include articles about transit issues, including bus rapid transit (BRT) initiatives throughout the U.S. and the world. These articles are included in the packet for information purposes only.

ATTACHMENTS: See news articles

PROPOSED MOTION: None

BART offers modest raises

By [Marisa Lagos](#)
Staff Writer

BART officials put a new contract proposal on the table Wednesday in the hopes of avoiding a strike, one day before agreements with the two unions representing the majority of the transit agency's labor force expire.

The new, four-year contract proposal for the two unions that represent about 2,500 clerical workers, station agents and train operators would provide a consumer price index-based raise in the last two years of the contract, require BART to continue to pay employee contributions to the state retirement system and maintain an eight-hour work day with a paid 30-minute break. It would increase employee contributions to their health benefits from their current \$25-a-month level, to \$100 a month beginning in July 2006, and to \$150 a month in July 2008.

The most important factor, argued BART officials, is that the proposal will still erase the agency's \$100 million shortfall over the next four years, a \$24 million gap for the 2005-06 fiscal year, while offering raises in a few years.

BART has argued that previous union proposals were unrealistic in asking for a 30 percent wage increase over four years, while union officials contend that the agency was asking them for a wage freeze and a 13 percent increase in benefit contributions over the same time period.

"We strongly believe this new formal proposal is reasonable and does not further burden our riders, while at the same time resolves a \$100 million, four-year deficit that threatens to put the entire transit system at risk," said Joel Keller, president of BART's board of directors, in a statement.

Union officials told The Associated Press they had not seen the new offer and criticized managers for bypassing the negotiating teams and "bargaining directly with the employees and the public," said Aaron Seivertson, a negotiator for the Amalgamated Transit Union 1555, one of the main employee unions.

If the two sides do not reach an agreement by midnight this evening, the unions would most likely go on strike Wednesday, July 6. The last BART strike, in 1997, snarled traffic around the Bay Area.

Also on Wednesday, the transit agency settled a contract with a smaller union that represents about 200 midlevel managers and train controllers, BART spokesman Linton Johnson said. The union did say they would honor picket lines in case of a strike, however.

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New Busway Gears Up for Fall Debut

MTA officials hope the San Fernando Valley's Orange Line will lure commuters from their cars and ease congestion on the 101 Freeway.

By Steve Hymon
Times Staff Writer

July 18, 2005

Every weekday morning, a few minutes before 8, Los Angeles City Councilman Dennis Zine steers his Ford Crown Victoria onto the 101 Freeway in Woodland Hills.

From there, it's about 25 miles to City Hall — or about 60 to 90 minutes. The only thing that makes the stop-and-start drive tolerable for Zine is passing the time by talking on his cellphone.

"The 101 is making me crazy," he said.

Beginning this fall, Zine will have an alternative. He can ride on a new 14-mile busway that will stretch from Warner Center in Woodland Hills to the Red Line subway stop in North Hollywood. He said he may take advantage of the busway — scheduled to open in late October.

The question for Zine and every other potential rider will be whether the bus is fast enough, cheap enough and convenient enough to get them out of their cars.

Traffic has been very slow on the 101 Freeway and surrounding streets for as long as many motorists can remember. For nearly as long, idea after idea has been floated to ease congestion. But none of them — light rail, subway, monorail, freeway widening or a double-decker highway — came to fruition.

After surviving legal challenges and budget negotiations, the \$349.6-million east-west busway is on track. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority will operate it much like a train, running mostly on an exclusive, two-lane road from Woodland Hills to North Hollywood.

Given the MTA's record with other large projects, the San Fernando Valley busway, which has been dubbed the Orange Line, will be watched closely. Since 1990, the agency

has completed four rail lines at a cost of nearly \$7 billion. But ridership has increased only 7% since 1988, when the MTA ran only buses.

The Orange Line will open two years after the debut of the \$859-million Gold Line, which even MTA officials admit is very slow. And its ridership — almost 15,000 passengers per weekday — is fewer than half the number expected by the transit agency.

But if the busway gets too few riders, the city of Los Angeles — the biggest community that's part of the regional transit agency — will step in and insist on changes, said David Fleming, who was appointed July 6 to the MTA board by new L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

Villaraigosa, now the president of the MTA board, has said Los Angeles would play a greater role in the agency than it has in the last four years under former Mayor James. K. Hahn. In the past, Villaraigosa has been an ardent supporter of MTA rail lines; he is pushing for both a light-rail line and a subway to the Westside.

Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky said the new busway is a calculated risk, but worth it.

"Unless you enjoy playing Russian roulette with traffic on the Ventura Freeway, the busway is the best possible solution we can have in our lifetime," he said, adding that he expects ridership to be strong.

It remains unclear how much time the busway will save. From Woodland Hills, a bus will take about 38 minutes to reach North Hollywood. Then it's an additional 25 to 30 minutes for riders taking the subway to downtown. That does not include time getting to and from the stations.

The MTA said the ride will be more comfortable than driving. And at \$3 per round trip to downtown — or less with a monthly pass — the Orange Line will be a little cheaper than driving. The question is whether that will be enough of a draw.

"Total time from door to door is the No. 1 factor people use when selecting a mode of transportation," said Ryan Snyder, a transit planning consultant in West Los Angeles. "Beyond that, cost is very important and everything else is secondary: safety, comfort, ability to read."

Snyder said the MTA would better serve the region by aggressively expanding the number of its rapid buses — which make fewer stops than regular buses and have the power to keep traffic signals green. The rapid buses are so popular that New York City officials came to Los Angeles in the spring to study them.

In the Bay Area last year, Caltrain — similar to Metrolink in Southern California — cut the 47-mile journey between San Jose and San Francisco from 75 minutes to 57 minutes. Ridership immediately went up 12%, which Caltrain officials said is a huge leap.

"We find our passengers want as much frequency as possible, and they want speed," said Jayme Kunz, a spokeswoman for Caltrain. "And if you can give them the double whammy of frequency and speed, people will crowd onto the trains and stand for an hour."

MTA officials said they expect 22,000 people to ride the Orange Line each weekday by 2020. They are working on the assumption that 25% of those riders will forsake their cars to do so and that the rest are people who already use mass transit.

The MTA's chief executive, Roger Snoble, said the busway will lure riders because it mimics cross-Valley traffic patterns. "I do think we'll be able to save people time," he said.

For some Valley residents, it probably would be 20 to 30 minutes faster to take Metrolink trains to get downtown, though those trains mostly run only during rush hour and are more expensive, with a round-trip ticket from Van Nuys to downtown costing \$9.75.

Most of the busway is built atop an old rail right of way that the MTA obtained. It was scheduled in the 1990s to be a subway, but for reasons of cost and politics, the project was reconceived as a busway based on a similar project in Brazil.

The Orange Line's buses are 60 feet long and seat 57 passengers. They are sleek, spacious and low to the ground to make them easy to board. For the same reason, each has three doors instead of the usual two. Riders can buy tickets from machines at the curb, which the MTA said will reduce the time buses sit idle while passengers fumble with change at the fare box.

The MTA also is planting more than 800,000 native plants and 5,000 trees along the busway, with significant stretches including bike and pedestrian lanes. The busway will include stops near Los Angeles Valley College and the Van Nuys Civic Center. The scene is pastoral in the Sepulveda Basin, where the busway cuts across a former farm field before crossing the Los Angeles River on a new bridge.

But can good looks trump the issue of time?

Driving speeds on the 101 often range from zero to 35 mph during rush hour, according to Caltrans data. The average speed of the buses is expected to be 22 or 23 mph.

There will be no express service on the busway, and initially only six of the 13 stations will have parking, for a total of about 3,000 free spaces. MTA officials hope those who can't find parking at the Red Line's North Hollywood or Universal City stops — which fill up early each morning — will use the Orange Line.

Officials also said that if the line is extremely popular, it can be converted to light rail in the future — but that could mean crowded buses until then.

Unlike train lines, there will be no gates at the many north-south streets the Orange Line must cross. New traffic lights at those intersections will be programmed to give buses priority, but the buses won't be able to cruise through the Valley at freeway speeds.

James Okazaki, assistant general manager of the Los Angeles Department of Transportation, said his agency wanted the busway to go over or under major north-south streets, but that would have cost too much.

Okazaki said such over- or underpasses usually cost \$20 million to \$50 million each, but they allow buses or light-rail trains to run faster by avoiding traffic — which also is safer.

Significant segments of the Gold Line and Blue Line light-rail routes were built at street level. In the last 15 years, 74 people have been killed at Blue Line crossings, the MTA said, noting that 15 of those deaths were suicides.

Some bus riders are already not enamored with the Orange Line.

The MTA "originally sold it as an expansion of the bus system, but it's extracting resources from the current bus system," said Manuel Criollo, an organizer with the Bus Riders Union. "It's definitely cheaper than rail, but if they wanted a bus lane, all they need is a bucket of paint and a street."

Criollo said he worries that the existing bus system will not be well coordinated with the Orange Line, and that riders will spend a long time traveling on local buses to the busway. That's already a problem with bus and rail lines, he said.

On a recent afternoon in Pasadena, for example, the Gold Line deposited its few passengers at the Allen Avenue station. Two minutes later, a Pasadena bus pulled up to a nearby stop — and then sat for 10 minutes while the driver took a break.

"I think if we had a system where people knew that they could walk to the corner and get a bus that takes them to the train and that the bus and train schedules were synchronized, people would use it — but we don't have it," said Councilman Ed Reyes, an MTA board member for the last four years.

Reyes said the Orange Line will be a good investment — if the MTA or the city is creative about creating more DASH lines or even van lines that circulate through neighborhoods frequently and take residents to transit stops or commercial areas.

In other places, busways have worked, particularly in the Miami area, Ottawa and Sydney, Australia. It remains to be seen whether the widely dispersed commuting

patterns — and to some extent the behavior — of Angelenos will be a good fit.

New MTA board member Richard Katz, a former assemblyman appointed to the panel by Villaraigosa, said that if commuters use the new busway even one day a week, it may significantly reduce traffic.

Councilman Greig Smith, who represents the northwestern San Fernando Valley, is not sold on the project, though he said he hopes his expectations are wrong.

"It won't be fast enough do the job," Smith said. "You're not going to get people out of a car to take a bus."

Phoenix bus strike averted
Unions agree to 5-year deal
Ginger D. Richardson and Bob Golfen
The Arizona Republic
Jul. 1, 2005 12:00 AM

A widespread bus strike that would have left thousands of commuters seeking alternative means of transportation was narrowly averted Thursday night after union representatives voted at the eleventh hour to accept a new contract.

Under the new deal with ATC Phoenix, the private company that operates 73 percent of Phoenix's bus system, workers will receive a new wage-and-benefits package that gives them an average of 3.6 percent more every year for the next five years.

The two unions, Teamsters Local 104 and Operating Engineers Local 428, ratified the new deal around 8:30 p.m. and notified Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon of the agreement just before 9.

Their previous contract expired at midnight.

"I just want to thank all the parties for working together to avoid a strike that would have been harmful to everyone," a relieved Gordon said by telephone.

Rick Wolf, chief steward at the north facility for Local 428, said they got a fair deal but wishes they could have gotten more.

"We all understand that times are tough now in the city," Wolf said.

Added Paul Robedeau, chief steward at the south facility for Local 428, "We're hopefully doing our part to help out with their (the city's) economic problems."

Both men said they were happy to have job security for the next five years. The two unions represent 72 service workers and 100 mechanics.

The mechanics voted 70 to 18 in favor of the new deal, and all but one Teamster supported the agreement.

City officials had grown increasingly concerned about the work stoppage as the deadline grew nearer, in large part because ATC, in the third year of a five-year contract with Phoenix, operates such a large part of the city's bus system.

A strike would have heavily affected commuters in the central and southern portions of Phoenix, where the majority of the company's lines are located.

Gordon and other city officials had gathered at City Hall to await word of the vote and to prepare a city response in case of a work stoppage.

A strike would have idled 39 routes and left about 120,000 riders in Phoenix and neighboring communities without reliable public transit.

The negotiations were tense down to the last minute, and a federal mediator was brought in on Sunday to help facilitate the negotiations.

The city was largely on the sidelines during the discussions because none of the workers is actually a city employee. But Gordon and his staff still had the leeway to put pressure on both sides because Phoenix owns the buses and pays the bills.

They monitored the talks closely and made pleas with both union representatives and ATC to keep working.

It is the first time in nearly two decades that a bus strike has actually been avoided. Workers walked off the job after contract talks broke down in 1990, 1995 and 2000, said Ed Zuercher, Gordon's senior deputy chief of staff.

"I think that's because we all got together in the beginning, before it was too late, and tried to work it out," Gordon said.

The only group that did not ratify the deal is Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1433, which represents about 675 drivers.

The union had participated in the talks until Wednesday but postponed its negotiations because of a contract clause that allows a 90-day extension or "cooling-off" period in the event of an impasse.

The drivers, who had said they would honor the picket lines if the other two unions went on strike, are expected to resume talks with ATC over a new contract.

Staff reporter Emily Bittner contributed to this article.

June 19, 2005, 10:15AM

'Rubber tire rail service' a hit in Vegas

City's sleek hybrid system is quick, quiet and efficient — just don't call it a bus

By **KIM COBB**

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LAS VEGAS - When "MAX" pulls into one of its curbside stations, its wheels are practically invisible.

It's sleek, relatively quiet, and is propelled by a diesel-electric hybrid motor that doesn't belch black smoke. Passengers buy tickets from a vending machine and get on and off through four wide doors quickly without having to step up.

MAX looks like a train, and that's no accident.

Las Vegas is one of a growing number of American communities embracing what transportation wonks call "bus rapid transit."

It's a hybrid system that combines the flexibility and lower cost of bus travel with speed similar to train service. Another appealing aspect: The Federal Transportation Administration will provide start-up funds for bus rapid transit in an era when it questions the high cost of building rail.

Houston's Metropolitan Transit Authority announced last week that it plans to run BRT on four routes voters approved for light rail in a November 2003 referendum. Metro plans to lay rails on dedicated rights of way on the North, Southeast, Harrisburg and Uptown routes. But the agency will pave the rails over and run something like Las Vegas' MAX vehicles in those corridors until the ridership is high enough to justify converting to light rail like the line that runs on Main Street.

In announcing the plan last week, Metro officials indicated that it was part of a deal with House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Sugar Land, and others to unlock federal transit funding that has been unavailable to Houston.

The plan to substitute buses — however high-tech and sleek — for rail has not sat well with some black and Hispanic communities that were scheduled for rail lines. Leaders in those communities argue that they helped pass the 2003 referendum, voting for the plan in far greater proportions than whites, because they expected rail lines.



Eric Jamison / For the Chronicle

Las Vegas' Metropolitan Area Express (MAX) looks like a train but runs on rubber tires.

RESOURCES

HOUSTON AND VEGAS

The bus rapid transit system proposed for Houston has some similarities to the Metropolitan Area Express (MAX) system operating in Las Vegas, as well as a key difference that Metro officials say is crucial.

How they're alike

- **Vehicles:** Run on rubber tires, but look more like trains with multiple doors and tickets purchased in advance.
- **Boarding:** Passengers board from raised platforms level with the floor of the vehicle.
- **Navigation:** Vehicles have drivers, but are partly guided by sensors on the vehicles and their paths.

How they're different

- **MAX:** Shares its entire eight-mile route with some other traffic, though in most of the route cars may only enter the bus lane for right turns.
- **Metro:** BRT vehicles would run in dedicated corridors like the one on the Main Street light rail line. Other vehicles could cross the corridor at designated places but would not run in the same lanes. Train track would be built into the corridors for use later when Metro believes ridership will justify conversion to light rail.

Political headaches

This sentiment could cause political headaches for Metro and Mayor Bill White, a major cheerleader for the new plan.

Part of his and Metro's argument is that the technology in a BRT vehicle is different than with a traditional bus, frequently using a hybrid power source. Metro hasn't settled on a vehicle for its proposed system, but officials have indicated a preference for a hybrid diesel-electric engine to cut down on noise and emissions; automatic guidance systems; and synchronization with traffic signals to cut down on delays at red lights.

Some systems use real-time tracking technology to keep the vehicles on schedule, and message signs at stations to inform riders when the next bus will arrive.

They frequently run on their own rights of way so they aren't slowed by vehicle traffic, and have rail-like stations instead of bus stops.

But transit officials say image, not technology, is what sells BRT. Las Vegas transit officials repeat the industry mantra that people view buses as a second-class alternative, but find rail glamorous.

"We refer to it as rubber tire rail service," said June DeVoll, transit operations administrator for the Regional Transit Commission of Southern Nevada.

"The B-word (bus) should not be in here anywhere," she said, flipping through a stack of marketing material for MAX — which stands for Metropolitan Area Express.

"If it looks like a rail, and acts like a rail, what difference does it make if it has rubber tires?" DeVoll asked.

System differences

Metro officials in Houston have said almost the same thing, though they are quick to contrast the Houston plan with the one in Las Vegas, which runs in special traffic lanes shared with cars. Metro's BRT would run in separate guideways that officials say would be identical to the one used by the Main Street light rail. Despite much-publicized crashes with cars attempting to cross tracks illegally, MetroRail generally does not share lanes with vehicles.

"That's a huge difference," said Metro president and CEO Frank Wilson.

The separate corridors may be key to Metro closing the deal, said Cliff Henke, senior director at Weststart-Calstart, a nonprofit organization that promotes advanced transportation technology.

A more stylized vehicle is important to reinforce that BRT is different, he said.

"But what really changes is frequency, reliability and speed of travel," Henke said. "That's really, no pun intended, where the rubber meets the road.

"If you're on a sexy bus and it's still slow and unreliable, that's not very helpful," Henke said.

Much better service

On a recent weekday afternoon, MAX rider Mike Tamblyn, 38, was headed to work. He used to ride the old local bus along the same route to the downtown transit center, but says the service on MAX is much better.

"It's real quick. I can be home from work within an hour," Tamblyn said, adding that's half the time it took him on a traditional bus.

"Watch how quick this stop is," Tamblyn said as the MAX bus eased into the station. "There could be 15 people on the platform and they'd be on in no time."

A woman in a motorized cart was waiting at the station. The handicap ramp lowered in about 10 seconds, she rolled aboard, the driver helped her buckle in and the bus cleared the station in about a minute.

Bus driver Sigifredo Villa said he usually stops for about 30 seconds at each station. Because people buy their tickets from a vending machine, and are not required to show them when they board, they don't have to queue up at a fare box.

"We don't have to wait for people to dig for change," Villa said.

MAX is powered by a hybrid engine that automatically switches between electric and diesel. The buses include an automatic system that reads lines painted on the roadway to guide the vehicles as close as possible to the curb at stations built almost a foot off the ground. This allows passengers to enter the bus at the platform level, without stepping up.

Magnetic guiding system

Metro boss Wilson says the Houston agency is planning to use an optical or magnetic guiding system for its BRT.

The optical guidance system has been a troublesome gadget in Las Vegas.

The stripes painted on the roadway to guide MAX fade quickly on the asphalt mix commonly used in the city. Because other vehicles use the dedicated MAX lane to make right turns, the dirt and oil they deposit on the guidance lines quickly makes them unreadable.

The system cost an extra \$90,000 per bus, and the Regional Transit Commission won't include it in future purchases of MAX vehicles.

But the myopic guidance system appears to be the transit agency's only complaint.

The first MAX line, running 7.8 miles along a commercial/residential section of Las Vegas Boulevard, is popular with riders. MAX runs in its own dedicated lane for 5.5 miles, and in mixed traffic for 2.3 miles.

Surveys show travel time has been reduced by over 40 percent for passengers, and ridership is up 30 percent in the corridor, which also is served by traditional local bus service. The transit agency's surveys show that 10 percent of current MAX riders were driving their cars before MAX service began.

"We've proved we could do what we said we could do," DeVoll said. The Federal Transit Administration has included the Las Vegas line on its list of BRT demonstration projects, aimed at providing a baseline for study by transit agencies.

Congested highways

The southern Nevada agency is making plans to build another MAX line in the southwest section of town, hoping to lure people out of their cars and onto MAX, thereby cutting down on traffic congestion.

As in Houston, the transit agency is struggling to draw people out of their cars, off congested highways and onto mass transit.

Sandy Smith, 60, is the kind of Las Vegas resident local transit officials are trying to attract. A state employee, he had been driving his minivan to work downtown until the transmission went out.

He used to ride the old local bus on the same route, so he noticed immediately that riding MAX took half the time of a traditional bus. He's convinced that the long stretch of dedicated lane is what makes the difference.

But once the van comes out of the shop, Smith will wave goodbye to MAX.

"I'll drive," Smith said, adding a sentiment also common in Houston: "I like the convenience of my own private transportation."

Rad Sallee contributed to this report from Houston

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Posted on: Monday, June 13, 2005

COMMENTARY

Transit: What is happening elsewhere?

By Cliff Slater

Normally if you are going to invest in a new business, you want to know how that type of business is faring in other communities. Strangely, we fail to do that for rail transit proposals.

Yes, our elected officials go to other cities and kick the tires, so to speak. However, they do not then undertake the laborious examination of operating and financial results that a proper investment decision requires.

Texas Transportation Institute, which monitors the nation's traffic congestion, has said that, "To accomplish a goal of maintaining a constant congestion level in these areas by only adding transit riders (would require) expanding transit systems by more than one-third of the current ridership each year."

That's a 250 percent increase every three years and clearly, this is not happening here, on the Mainland or in Europe. Everywhere the percentage of commuters using public transportation is in decline.

Here's what they are talking about:

Honolulu has 400,000 commuters and, of these, 8 percent, or 32,000, use public transportation. If we do not increase this percentage, it means that for each 10 percent increase in commuters, or 40,000, we will have 3,200 new commuters using public transportation and the rest, some 36,800, using other means, with the vast majority of them driving alone.

That means increased congestion.

On the other hand, if we set ourselves the goal of keeping level the number of those commuting by automobile, then we have to double the percentage of people using public transportation for each 10 percent growth in commuters. This would keep traffic congestion at the same level it is today.

What is the likelihood of that happening?

If you examine the U.S. Department of Transportation's analysis of America's commuting habits, you find that between 1980 and 2000, no metropolitan area with rail succeeded in increasing the percentage of commuters using public transportation. One area, San Diego, held level, but all others experienced declines.

This is why from 1990 to 2000, despite federal, state and local operating subsidies and capital outlays for public transportation totaling over \$200 billion, it lost ground. The

national increase in commuters driving to work was 13 million; those commuters using public transportation declined. It is also why all rail areas saw significant increases in traffic congestion.

Are there any answers?

Given the reality that we are not getting out of our cars — no matter what — and given our inability to fund expansion of our regular highway system sufficiently, then we have to turn to some form of congestion pricing. This is the only tool that will allow us to manage a highway for the maximum throughput of vehicles. It should not be surprising since the variable pricing of resources for which there is too much demand is how we manage everything from housing to clothing to food.

Honolulu's best initial move could be High Occupancy Toll lanes, or HOT lanes, between Waialeale and Iwilei in the form of an elevated reversible two-lane highway on which buses and vanpools would have priority and automobiles pay a toll.

If anyone knows of any other method that has reduced traffic congestion in practice (and not just in theory), please let me know.

Cliff Slater is a regular columnist whose footnoted columns are at www.lava.net/cslater.

[What new BART contract means to Bay Area riders](#)

- [Patrick Hoge, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

Thursday, July 7, 2005

An agreement that halted a threatened BART strike early Wednesday satisfied everyone involved -- from representatives of more than 2,000 workers to transit district managers to thousands of commuters relieved that they can ride trains without interruption.

Officials at the Bay Area's largest transit system said the four-year pact, the quickest to be resolved in more than a decade, will prevent runaway deficits caused primarily by skyrocketing health-care costs and will guarantee that the system's 310,000 daily passengers won't have to pay higher fares.

Nearly 2,300 train operators, station agents, clerical employees, and maintenance workers ranging from janitors to electricians and mechanics will receive pay raises and keep their benefits.

While commuters slept Tuesday night not knowing whether BART trains would be idled, the 12:01 a.m. Wednesday deadline for a union walkout that threatened to wreak havoc on area traffic came and went.

Nearly three hours later, after leaders of the transit district and its two largest unions stopped the clock and exchanged several more proposals in BART's former headquarters in downtown Oakland, a deal was struck at 2:52 a.m.

A little more than an hour later, the first trains rolled out of the yards as commuters awoke and learned the good news from the Internet, radio or TV.

But as the strike deadline arrived, the outcome was anyone's guess. Dozens of management and union officials, struggling to deal with wage and work-rule issues as well as costly benefits, were camped inside as reporters waited in the fog outside.

On one side was BART General Manager Tom Margro. On the other side were Roxanne Sanchez, president of the 1,450 member Service Employees International Union 790, which represents clerks and maintenance workers, and Harold Brown, president of the 830-member Amalgamated Transit Union 1555, which represents station agents and train operators.

After four days of near round-the-clock talks and three months of negotiations, the unions agreed at 11:35 p.m. to a state mediator's request for an extra half-hour so management could study their latest offer.

"Of course, we stopped the clock," said Brown. "With that, everybody's heart stopped. Either we were going to be signing an agreement or we were going out on strike."

But the managers came back with another offer, and the deadline was moved to 1:30 a.m. -- the final extension, said Art Pulaski, executive secretary treasurer of the California Labor Federation.

Negotiators from the unions came back with one more request, a second \$300 bonus for each worker on top of 7 percent raises over four years and a one-time \$300 lump sum to be paid in January. BART refused to give any more, the unions conceded, and both sides agreed they had a deal.

Relieved negotiators shook hands. It was nearly 2:45 a.m., and many people in the room had gone for two days on little or no sleep.

Weeks of public attacks from both sides melted away, and dozens of representatives gathered for a news conference to congratulate each other and extol their virtues. Employees who had vilified Margro for his \$309,000 salary and bonus package this year burst into enthusiastic applause.

Thus ended the latest round of tortuous contract negotiations at BART, which has a history of bitter labor relations and last went on strike for six days in 1997. BART officials called the new contract deal historic, because it did not drag on until September or require intervention from politicians or others.

"We have never been able to be on time by ourselves without outside interference," said Joel Keller, president of BART's board of directors, who was present in the final hours, with directors Bob Franklin and Lynette Sweet.

BART managers still resent the pressure Bay Area politicians applied on the district in 2001 to approve a four-year contract with 22 percent raises. Keller voted for that contract but now says it was "not a prudent vote on my part."

This time the keys to the deal were numerous and complex, with the most significant breakthrough being the adoption of a financing plan to create a fully funded retirement medical system for employees over the next 30 years.

"It maintains an excellent health plan for years to come in an era when in some cases rising health costs are actually destroying the economic fabric of the American family," said SEIU 790 negotiator Larry Hendel.

To pay for it, the unions agreed to triple their health-care contributions from \$25 to \$75 a month beginning in January, with 3 percent annual increases after that. At one point, BART offered up to 4 percent raises over four years, with health costs rising to \$150 a month per employee.

In addition, the unions agreed that money that was scheduled to be added in 2011 to one of two retirement plans that the district pays for entirely -- an annual sum equal to 1.63 percent of employee salaries -- will be dedicated at that time to a retirement medical fund until 2033.

BART agreed to give employees the \$300 bonuses in January to pay for the first six months of increased health costs. Employees will not have to pay extra for health plans that cost more than Kaiser Permanente, as management had proposed.

And the transit district agreed to rescind the recent layoffs of 11 employees.

Virtually all of BART's nearly 3,000 employees, including most managers, are likely to get the same deal because they typically get whatever the two largest unions negotiate.

BART had insisted that if preventive action was not taken on the retiree medical issue, the district would face a nearly \$100 million deficit over the next four years. Union officials accused the district of painting an overly dire picture, and hired actuaries and pension attorneys to come up with a plan that required less money up front from employees.

Employees will vote on the tentative contract in the coming weeks. Under the deal, there will be no raises next year, but increases of 2 percent in fiscal 2006-07, 2 percent in 2007-08 and 3 percent in 2008-09. The contract expires June 30, 2009.

On work rules, the unions won the right to take to arbitration changes BART wants to make to several job descriptions as part of a \$40 million effort to modernize systems such as payroll and inventory, much of which is now done manually. People whose jobs are eliminated will be kept on the payroll for a year while efforts are made to find them another job with BART.

BART says new technology will save as much as \$21 million between 2006 and 2009.

But the unions succeeded in getting the district to wait, for now, on several other changes it wanted to make to work rules and business practices, some of which union officials said would affect worker safety. BART officials had compiled a list of 29 rules that they said cost the district as much as \$5 million a year, although union officials said the number was inflated.

One of the changes management sought was more accountability over the time employees spend on union activities while on the payroll. Last year, members of ATU Local 1555 spent 22,500 hours -- the equivalent of almost 11 full-time employees -- on union activities, BART said.

"That was an abuse of a privilege," said BART Director Sweet, who suggested that union officials realized a strike would not sit well with the public given that transit district employees are well-paid.

Union president Brown said he thinks BART's estimate of the time employees spend on union work was inaccurate and that he supports the practice.

"It can become time-consuming, but it's all legitimate time," Brown said. "It represents the union's ability to defend its members and enforce the contract."